

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3516

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY SANA

S E C R E T KHARTOUM 0340

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ET, SU, US

SUBJECT: NEW PHASE IN OS/EPMG RELATIONS CARRIES IMPLICATIONS
FOR USG

REF: KHARTOUM 0333 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. EXCHANGE OF PUBLIC POLEMICS BETWEEN TEFERI BENTE
AND NIMEIRI APPEARS TO HAVE MOVED GOS/DPMG RELATIONS INTO
NEW PHASE. GOS IS LIKELY HENCEFORTH TO GIVE STRONG SUPPORT TO
ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT, SUBJECT SOME UNEXPECTED
REVERSAL IN WHAT ARE SEEN HERE AS ANTI-NIMEIRI EPMG POLICIES
RE SUDANESE EXILES AND COOPERATION WITH LARG AND USSR. NEW
SITUATION HAS ALREADY RAISED QUESTIONS IN KHARTOUM AS TO
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USG POLICY RE BOTH ETHIOPIA AND SUDAN. END SUMMARY.

1. TEFERI BENTE'S CRITICAL REMARKS OF JANUARY 28 (ADDIS 535),
AND NIMEIRI'S PUBLIC RIPOSTE TWO DAYS LATER (SEPTTEL), HAVE
MOVED GOS/EPMG RELATIONS INTO NEW PHASE. WHILE
HISTORICALLY CHARACTERIZED BY DEEP-SEATED AMBIVALENCE DUE
LANGUAGE, RELIGION AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES, THESE RELATIONS IN

RECENT YEARS HAVE ALSO REFLECTED FAIR AMOUNT CORDIALITY AND MUTUAL COOPERATION. HAILE SELASSIE HELPED MEDIATE END SUDANESE CIVIL WAR AND NIMEIRI SOUGHT RETURN FAVOR OVER ERITREA.

2. UNTIL AT LEAST OCTOBER, 1976, NIMEIRI REGIME WANTED AN ERITREAN SETTLEMENT WITHIN GENERAL PARAMETERS OF PRESERVATION ETHIOPIAN INTEGRITY AS MUCH, IF NOT MORE, THAN EITHER OF PROTAGONISTS. THIS WAS BECAUSE CONTINUED FIGHTING IN ERITREA: (A) PROLONGED THE GOS PROBLEM, AS AN ARAB REGIME, OF MAINTAINING CAREFUL BALANCE BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND ARAB COUNTRIES SUPPORTING THE ERITREANS; (B) MAGNIFIED FLOW OF ERITREAN REFUGEES TO SUDAN, AUGMENTING BURDEN FOR CHURCHMOUSE POOR SUDANESE; AND (C) CONTRADICTED FEDERAL SOLUTION OF SORT NIMEIRI HAD WORKED OUT RE SUDANESE SOUTH IN WHICH REGIME TAKES GREAT PRIDE. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE WAS NEVER SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE THAT EPMG LEADERS SAW SUDANESE ROLE IN THESE POSITIVE TERMS AND SUDANESE EVIDENTLY FAILED TO CONVINCE THEM OF KHARTOUM'S FUNDAMENTAL GOOD INTENTIONS ON ISSUE OF ETHIOPIAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY.

3. LIBYAN CONTACTS WITH EPMG IN PERIOD AFTER LAST SUMMER'S ABORTIVE COUP HERE SEEM TO HAVE BEEN MAJOR FACTOR IN CONVINCING NIMEIRI THAT EPMG WAS BASICALLY UNINTERESTED IN ACHIEVING ATTAINABLE COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT IN ERITREA. FROM THAT TIME ON, PRIVATE COMMENTS SUDANESE LEADERSHIP TO US HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF WHAT THEY DESCRIBE AS EPMG'S RADICALIZATION AND LACK OF REALISM ON ERITREAN ISSUE. AS EARLY AS DECEMBER, NIMEIRI WAS INDICATING PRIVATELY HIS BELIEF THAT
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ERITREA WOULD BECOME INDEPENDENT IN A FEW MONTHS. HOWEVER, HE CONTINUED TO AVOID CROSSING RUBICON OF ENUNCIATING THIS POLICY SHIFT PUBLICLY. DOOR WAS THUS LEFT SLIGHTLY AJAR FOR SOME IMPROVEMENT IN KHARTOUM/ADDIS TIES. TEFERI BENTE'S PUBLIC ATTACK JANUARY 28, PLUS OTHER INDICATIONS EPMG WAS NOT MOVING TO TAKE REASSURING ACTION ON ISSUE OF EXILED ANSAR, HAS NOW PROMPTED NIMEIRI TO MAKE CLEAR GOS SUPPORT FOR ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE. WHILE THIS REPRESENTS IN ONE SENSE A MAJOR POLICY SHIFT FOR NIMEIRI REGIME, IT IS CONGRUENT WITH LONG-STANDING GOS EFFORT TO GET ERITREAN PROBLEM SETTLED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. PUT IN BASIC TERMS, GOS HAS SIMPLY CONCLUDED THAT ERITREAN PROBLEM WILL NOT BE SOLVED BY NEGOTIATION AND ACCORDINGLY MUST BE SOLVED BY FORCE. BECAUSE OF KHARTOUM'S ARAB CONNECTIONS, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON, SUDAN COULD HARDLY SUPPORT ETHIOPIA AGAINST ERITREANS IN SEEKING SUCH SOLUTION, AND THE REVERSE HAS CONSEQUENTLY NOW OCCURRED.

4. SEEN FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, ETHIOPIAN WILLINGNESS, FOR WHATEVER REWARDS, TO TOY WITH ANSAR ENEMIES OF NIMEIRI

REGIME, WAS PLAYING WITH FIRE AND HAS SERVED TO BRING ABOUT WHAT THE EPMG HAS LONG SOUGHT TO AVOID. THE PREDICTABLE RESULT HAS ALREADY BEEN VISIBLE IN EPMG DEFEATS AND DEFECTIONS ALONG ITS WESTERN FRONTIER. FOR EPMG TO ATTRIBUTE WORSENING RELATIONS WITH SUDAN TO KHARTOUM PRESS COVERAGE OF THESE EVENTS THUS BEGS BASIC QUESTION, WHILE SEEMINGLY CONFUSING SYMPTOMS WITH UNDERLYING DISEASE.

5. FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE REMAINS LACK OF MUTUAL TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SUDANESE AND ETHIOPIAN LEADERSHIPS. WHILE GOS POSITION HAD BEEN THAT THERE NO GOS/EPMG PROBLEM REQUIRING MEDIATION, THERE HAD BEEN WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER SOME SORT OF DIRECT BILATERAL CONTACTS TO GET AT THE SOURCE OF THE MALAISE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, NOT SIMPLY ITS MANIFESTATIONS. RECENT EXCHANGE PUBLIC POLEMICS HAS NO DOUBT POSTPONED ANY SUCH CONSTRUCTIVE EVOLUTION. WHETHER SOME DEGREE OF CORDIALITY BETWEEN TWO NEIGHBORING MILITARY
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REGIMES CAN BE RESTORED SOON WOULD SEEM TO REST ON EXTENT TO WHICH EPMG MAY REVERSE WHAT IS SEEN HERE AS ITS ANTI-NIMEIRI POLICIES ON ANSAR AND COOPERATION WITH LARG AND USSR. NEW SITUATION HAS ALREADY PROMPTED QUESTION HERE AS TO USG POLICIES WITH RESPECT BOTH ETHIOPIA AND SUDAN. BREWER

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